Dialogue and Agreement Models in the Modern Ecumenical Movement (1910-1983): Minimal, Comparative, and Convergence Ecumenisms

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Resumen: El artículo presenta tres de los modelos más relevantes para diálogo y acuerdo durante la llamada etapa moderna del movimiento ecuménico, esto es, desde la histórica Conferencia misionera de Edimburgo de 1910 hasta el comienzo del invierno ecuménico. En primer lugar, presenta el modelo minimalista en relación con el Acuerdo de Bonn entre la Comunión anglicana y la Antigua Iglesia católica de la Unión de Utrecht, sus ventajas y sus deficiencias. En segundo lugar, el artículo estudia el modelo comparativo como principal marco metodológico de las primeras y segundas conferencias de Fe y Constitución en Lausana (1927) y Edimburgo (1937), y explica su incapacidad para trascender el nivel descriptivo, su carácter "estadístico" y su inadecuación para promover puntos de encuentro negociados entre las tradiciones cristianas. Por último, analiza el modelo de convergencia en lo que respecta a la estructura y el lenguaje comunes de sus documentos y cómo se convirtió en un medio para lograr un consenso limitado, especialmente tras la consolidación de organizaciones ecuménicas globales.

Palabras clave: modelos ecuménicos, minimalismo ecuménico, ecumenismo comparativo, ecumenismo de convergencia

Abstract: The article presents three of the most relevant models for dialogue and agreement during the so-called modern stage of the ecumenical movement, from the historic 1910 *Edinburgh Missionary Conference* to the beginning of the *Ecumenical Winter*. This article aims to accomplish the following: First, introduces the *Minimalist* model in relation to the Bonn Agreement between the Anglican Communion and the Old Catholic Church of the Union of Utrecht and its advantages and shortcomings. Second, assess the *Comparative* model as the main methodological framework of the first and second Faith and Order conferences in Lausanne (1927) and Edinburgh (1937) and explain its inability to transcend the descriptive level, its *statistical* nature, and its inability to promote negotiated points of encounter among Christian traditions. Third, analyze the *Convergence* model regarding the common structure and language of convergence documents and how it became a means to limit consensus, especially after the consolidation of global ecumenical fellowships.

Keywords: ecumenical models, ecumenical minimalism, comparative ecumenism, convergence ecumenism

INTRODUCTION

The current Church lives under conditions of profound ontological contradiction. On the one hand, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, an ecumenical declaration of invaluable importance in the history of Christianity, identifies the Church as "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.[1]" On the other hand, as stated by the *Roman Catholic Council of European Bishops' Conference* and the *Conference of European Churches* in the Ecumenical Letter (*Charta Oecumenica)* (2001): "Fundamental differences in faith are still barriers to visible unity. There are different views of the church and its oneness, of the sacraments and ministries,"[2] a reality that has even been cataloged as a *scandal* by the current bishop

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[1] CONSTANTINOPOLITAN COUNCIL I, *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* (Nicaea 381).

[2] ROMAN CATHOLIC COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE AND THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES, *Ecumenical Letter* (Strassbourg 2001) 4.

of Rome,[3] quoting the II Vatican Council decree Reintegration of Unity (*Unitatis Redintegratio).*[4]

This division into different traditions and local bishoprics, whether because of doctrinal, spiritual, or cultic differences or due to geographic reasons, has been a constant feature of the Church almost from its very beginning. The need for unity of teaching and the influence of governance during several historical stages and various ecumenical efforts at the time posed the question of methods, models, or strategies for achieving the long-desired unity of traditions. An exceptionally prolific stage of this ecumenical history is the so-called Modern period, a period which academics locate from the historic 1910 *Edinburgh Missionary Conference* till the beginning of the "Ecumenical Winter,", which Duguid-May situates after the 1983 Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) held in Vancouver, British Columbia.[5]

This article focuses on three of the most significant models of ecumenical dialogue and agreement during this stage: minimalist, comparative, and convergence. For the minimalist model, thus article addresses the historical development of the most successful initiative that uses it: the Bonn Agreement, an ecumenical statement between the Anglican Communion and the Old Catholic Church of the Union of Utrecht, which claims for *full communion* between both traditions. This section includes the role of Pope Leo XIII's Bull, *Apostolicae Curae* as an external catalyst to ecumenical efforts between both churches, and the *Encyclical on Anglican Orders* of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Meletios IV in 1922, acknowledging the same status of Roman Catholic and the Anglican ordinations. It also addresses the value and achievements of the Bonn Agreement, and the model it embodies, apart from the subsequent disuse of the model due to early

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[3] FRANCIS, General Audience, 22/01/2014, on-line: https://www.vatican.va/system/ sling/cqform/defaultlogin.html?resourc2Fholy_father2Ffrances2520co2Faudiences2 F20142Fdocuments2Fpapafrancesco_252020140122_udienza-generale_en.html& login24 24login 24 24 (accessed: 05/08/2017).

[4] II VATICAN COUNCIL, *Reintegration of Unity* (Vatican City 1964).

[5] M. DUGUID-MAY, "The Ecumenical Movement", in J. SCHJORRING – N. HJELM (ed.), *History of Global Christianity: History of Christianity in the 20th Century* (Brill, Leiden 2018) 147-181, 170.

and late dissident voices in both churches against its apparent superficiality, its renounce to reconciling the doctrinal and cultic richness of the involved traditions, its limited practical aspirations, and the nature of the communion it promotes, among other similar arguments.

For the comparative model, this article compares the beliefs and doctrines as a central notion of modern ecumenical efforts. It represents the main methodological framework of the first and second Faith and Order conferences in Lausanne (1927) and Edinburgh (1937), emphasizing the search for the so-called essentials of the Christian faith. It also pays attention to its most important advantages and alleged shortcomings, such as its inability to transcend the descriptive level, its *statistical* nature, and its inability to impulse negotiated points of encounter among Christian traditions or significant mutual enrichment between them.

The convergence model is the third significant ecumenical model developed during this historical stage. This article explores how the model became a means to limited consensus, which was seen as "both aim and basis for theological agreements,"[6] especially after the consolidation of global fellowships that vindicated the conciliar character of the Church. It also analyzes the common structure and language of the convergence documents and the conditions of their drafting and approval. Furthermore, the article presents the most important advantages of the model and its main shortcomings. For example, its inability to deal with the obvious doctrinal or liturgical differences that make churches distinct from each other, its exiguous capacity to manage doctrinal differences that simply resisted convergence, or how it overlooked the multi-dimensional character of religious belongings and experiences when focusing almost entirely on the so-called "cognitive" elements of each tradition.

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[6] E. VAN DER BORGHT, *Theology of Ministry: A reformed contribution to an ecumenical dialogue* (Brill, Leiden 2007) 154.

1. MINIMALIST MODEL

A unique model for ecumenical dialogue and agreement was developed by the Anglican Communion and the Old Catholic Church of the Union of Utrecht for the materialization of the Bonn Agreement in 1931, which established *full intercommunion* among both ecclesial communions. Specialists have called this model ecumenical minimalism or minimal ecumenism. The agreement consists of three main premises that are maintained by the signatory delegates, as follows:

1. Each communion recognizes the catholicity and independence of the other and maintains its own.
2. Each communion agrees to admit members of the other communion to participate in the sacraments.
3. Intercommunion[7] does not require from either communion the acceptance of all doctrinal opinion, sacramental devotion, or liturgical practice characteristic of the other, but implies that each believes the other to hold all the essentials of the Christian faith.[8]

This agreement is one of the exceptional examples in which ecumenical partners can claim full mutual ecclesial and sacramental communion.

This ecumenical milestone resulted from a series of encounters between both communions that started in the late 19th century. Since its origin, the Old Catholic Church manifested its indebtedness to the ecumenical tradition by participating in and directing the Bonn *Reunion Conferences* of 1874 and 1875. These conferences between representatives from the Orthodox tradition, the Anglican Communion, and the newly independent Old Catholics aimed to discuss historic ecclesial divisions and likely future communion among the participants. They were followed by the 1878 declaration of sympathy from the Lambeth Conference toward the Old Catholic

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[7] In 1958 the Anglican Communion suggested substituting *intercommunion* with *full communion*. The Old Catholic International Bishops' Conference agreed with this change in 1961.

[8] JOINT OLD CATHOLIC CHURCH – ANGLICAN COMMUNION COMMISSION, *The Bonn Agreement* (Bonn 1931).

Church and its further offer of support. In 1883 Anglicans were invited to participate in the Eucharist by the synod of the German Old Catholic Church; a similar invitation from the Anglican Communion was extended in the year 1888.

External factors also contributed to accelerating ecumenical endeavors between the communions. Pope Leo XIII's Bull Apostolic Care (*Apostolicae Curae)* in 1896 stated that "ordinations carried out according to the Anglican rite have been, and are, absolutely null and utterly void."[9] The Pope's Bull increased the urgency of the Anglican Communion for affirming the validity of its ordinations and its Catholic embeddedness. In this context, the 1920 Lambeth Conference issued a message to "all Christian people," which called "all the separated groups of Christians to agree in forgetting the things which are behind and reaching out toward the goal of a reunited Catholic Church." The nature of this reunification was also specified:

> We do not ask that anyone Communion should consent to be absorbed into another. We do ask that all should unite in a new and great endeavor to recover and to manifest to the world the unity of the Body of Christ for which he prayed.[10]

At the same time, the Anglican Communion initiated a series of discussions at the highest level with partners from the "Reunion Conferences," which successfully led to the *Encyclical on Anglican Orders* of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Meletios IV in 1922 and the acknowledgment of Anglican orders as of the "same validity as those of the Roman, Old Catholic, and Armenian Churches."[11] At the same time, Anglican conversations with the Old Catholic Church advanced significantly.

The 20's decade was the scenario of the consolidation of the Anglican–Old Catholic intercommunion. Following the Old Catholic's recognition of Anglican ordinations in 1925, an Anglican especial

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[9] LEO XIII, *Apostolic Care* (Vatican City 1896).

[10] LAMBETH CONFERENCE, *The Lambeth Conference: Resolutions Archive from 1920.* Resolution 9 (Anglican Communion Office, London 2005) 7.

[11] E. HARDY (ed.), *Orthodox Statements on Anglican Orders* (Morehouse-Gorham CO., New York 1994) 2.

commission was formed to analyze the Declaration of Utrecht and its theological compatibility with Anglican teachings. In 1930, the Lambeth Conference affirmed that "there is nothing in the Declaration of Utrecht inconsistent with the teaching of the Church of England."[12] In 1931, delegations from both communions met in Bonn and after considering the objections of inner groups such as the Anglican Evangelical Group Movement regarding topics such as transubstantiation, the Church's tradition, and the Eucharist as a propitiatory sacrifice, the Old Catholic delegation decided to yield positions in pursuit of intercommunion by declaring that:

1. [We] held the paramountcy of Scripture and stood by our article six.
2. [We] relegate the *Apocrypha* to a secondary place.
3. [We] repudiate transubstantiation.
4. [We] do not hold the Eucharist to be a propitiatory sacrifice (*sacrificium propitiatium).*[13]

The next day, on July 2, both delegations signed the Bonn Agreement in the Königshof Hotel on the banks of the Rhine River. Since then, both communions have maintained full sacramental and ecclesial communion.

The theological and ecumenical significance of the agreement is noteworthy, insomuch as it makes clear that the Anglican Church shares the "essentials of the Christian faith" with factions of Catholic Christianity. According to Douglas, the Bonn Agreement helped to foster two main ecumenical objectives: "[to cultivate] closer relationships with the Orthodox [Church] and [to lead to] the recognition of Anglican Orders by the Roman Catholic Church."[14] For diverse groups in the Anglican communion, the agreement

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[12] B. GEFFERT – L. BOERNEKE, *Catholics without Rome: Old Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans, and the Reunion Negotiations of the 1870s* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 2022) 88-89.

[13] LANG, "Letters from Douglas to Don, 2.7.1931", in *Lang Papers,* vol. 49, fol. 39v.

[14] C. METHUEN, "The Bonn Agreement and the Catholicization of Anglicanism: Anglicans and Old Catholics in the Lang papers and the Douglas papers 1920-1939", *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 97 (2007) 1-22, 17.

"[supported] Anglican claims to be rooted in the Catholic tradition"[15] and it ratified its rightful position alongside other historical Episcopal Churches. In this sense, the *Church Times* argued:

> Now that Reunion with the Old Catholics is likely to be achieved before long, it may be worth considering what its practical effect will be. Dogmatically its importance is very great. It makes it clear that the Anglican Church is in essential agreement in doctrine and practice with other parts of Catholic Christendom. It will emphasize that it is with the Catholic, as opposed to the Protestant bodies, that our real affinities lie.[16]

However, this did not convince dissident voices in the Old Catholic Church, who expressed their objections to the agreement because they believed it contributed to widening the gap with the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, any further attempt to restore communion or hypothetical reunification with its Roman counterpart would be even more challenging. Fortunately for the promoters of the agreement, these voices were largely outnumbered, given its many accomplishments.

The value and achievements of the Bonn Agreement (and the model it embodies) were highlighted by leaders from both communions during decades the after its signing. For example, the Anglican Reverend Claude Moss affirmed:

> There is no precedent in our history for the events (joint consecration, shared communion, exchange of priests) recorded in this memorandum. We have informal intercommunion with other Churches, Orthodox and Lutheran, but we have full intercommunion only with the Old Catholics. It is the first real breach in the isolation of the Anglican Communion since the Reformation.[17]

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[15] C. METHUEN, "The Bonn Agreement and the Catholicization of Anglicanism", 1.

[16] DOUGLAS, "The Church Times 18.9.1931" in *Douglas Papers*, vol. 75, fol. 183.

[17] MOSS, "Memorandum on Intercommunion with the Old Catholics" in *Lang Papers*, vol. 49, fol. 314.

He even maintained excessive optimism regarding the potential of the minimal model for future ecumenical endeavors: "The agreement of Bonn may perhaps form a model for further measures of reunion in the future."[18] This confidence was not unjustified, and the minimalist model proved to be adequate for reaching mutual recognition, dealing with thorny issues about ecclesial authority, conserving the congregational identity of the participants, and preserving the independent character of both communions by stating the clear intent not to form a unique communion or absorbing the other. Furthermore, it meant the formal recognition of Anglican ordinations by a part of the Catholic tradition for the first time since the *Act of Supremacy* of 1558, and it allowed the participation of members of the other communion in the sacraments. Nevertheless, a few years later, the minimal model was the target of harsh criticism and objections that disfavored its use in further ecumenical endeavors.

Most criticism of the minimal model focuses on its apparent superficiality, given that it completely overlooks the implications of doctrinal differences. The same is true for liturgical practices, ordinations, and sacramental devotions. Thus, it explicitly encourages to renounce to the attempt for reconciling the doctrinal and practical richness of the churches in the wake of declaring communion among the parts, as Bishop Joseph Reikens affirmed at the 1875 Bonn Conference: "If we are to wait until we can agree about such questions as the number of ecumenical councils we can no more become one church than one nation."[19] Nevertheless, Reikens' quasi-utilitarian strategy toward ecumenical communion experienced diminishing support in subsequent decades. For example, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rev Michael Ramsey, warned in an address to the WCC New Delhi Assembly in 1961 that "easy superficial theology is a danger. Such theology suggests that we need only agree a few simple principles to arrive unity" and he added: "there is the risk of inadequate examination of the principles when that happens."[20] In the

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[18] Moss, "Memorandum on Intercommunion with the Old Catholics" in *Lang Papers*, vol. 49, fol. 314.

[19] A. PLUMMER, *Conversations with Dr. Dollinger, 1870-90* (R. Boudens, Leuven 1985) 140.

[20] ISTINA, In account of the New Delhi meeting (1964) 319.

same sense, the Evangelical-Reformed Church of North-West Germany affirmed in its response to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry BEM* (a convergence document): "it was not right to aim at the wording of minimal consensus. Special experiences of faith and theological insights should not be leveled out but introduced into the ecumenical process of reflection."[21]

Two additional substantial flaws of the model are its minimal aspirations and the vague nature of the communion it promotes. In this sense, Evans argues: "Here a minimum agreement gave a minimum union,"[22] insomuch as regarding faith doctrines, ordination matters and liturgical practices both communions remained utterly unintegrated. This situation was already alerted by members of both communions during the agreement negotiations, as Emhardt stated: "[There are] those within both communions who would press for more intimate relations than mere intercommunion" or who wished for a "closer association than that implied in the Bonn Agreement."[23] Likewise, because of its succinct character, the minimalist model restrains the signatories to deep into the nature of the future intercommunion, its extent, and the steps toward a more profound unity. In practice, more than 90 years after being signed, the Bonn Agreement barely promoted an exiguous unity and partnership between the communions, their clerics, and congregations. Furthermore, the ecclesial identities of both traditions remain almost entirely unaffected by the other. For these reasons, the model was relegated and fell into disuse in further ecumenical endeavors.

2. THE COMPARATIVE MODEL

The principle of comparison among beliefs and doctrinal stances of worldwide Christian traditions was a central notion of the modern ecumenical movement since its beginnings in the late 19th century

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[21] M. THURIAN (ed.), *Churches respond to BEM: Official responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" text* (WCC Publications, Geneva 1987) 94.

[22] G. R. EVANS, *Method in Ecumenical Theology* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994) 64.

[23] EMHARDT, "Wm. C. Emhardt to Kenninck, 31.8.1931", in *Lang Papers*, vol. 49, fol. 117-118.

when the impossibility of dealing with a full image of the Christian Church and its faith became increasingly evident. In the early 20th century, the comparative approach of the German scholar Ernst Troeltsch was seconded by Church leaders like the Swedish Lutheran archbishop Nathan Söderblom, as part of a movement that argued for the potential of this model to enhance the spirit of fraternity among a global Church meant to emerge from centuries of divisions, conflicts, and even religious wars. Likewise, the comparative model considerably influenced the newly surging Faith and Order movement.

In the first half of the 20th century, the comparison model consolidated among ecumenical circles and settled the methodological agenda of Faith and Order. Its institutional use was first suggested at the World Missionary Conference of 1910, by Charles H. Brent, Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the United States. The Faith and Order movement presented itself as complementary to Life and Work, which aimed mainly at joint Christian social engagement. In contrast, Faith and Order pondered "the differences of belief, liturgical practice, polity, and ministry among the various Christian denominations."[24] One of its original objectives was to produce a "clear statement and analysis of the existing differences and agreements"[25] among the different partaking traditions, to identify potential theological points of encounter. Thus, the exposition and comparison of doctrinal positions among churches marked the methodological agenda of the first and second Faith and Order conferences in Lausanne (1927) and Edinburgh (1937).

This first stage of Faith and Order was additionally marked by the influence of the Roman Catholic inculturation model and its search for the "essentials of faith." The model affirmed that "the church has different cultural expressions that must be honored, and differing

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[24] B. Knowles, *A Timeline of Global Christianity* (Wipf and Stock, Eugene 2019) 106.

[25] G. Gassmann, "What is Faith and Order?", The World Council of Churches, 19/03/1995, online: https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/what-is-faith-and-order-gunther-gassmann (accessed: 06/02/2021).

confessional or doctrinal traditions"[26] that somewhat constituted accessory coatings and modes of transmission of the "essentials of the Christian faith." Hence, there is a need for a comparative approach that makes the shared essentials evident while celebrating each tradition's contextual elements. While theologians such as John Hick postponed the revelation of this essential mystery as an eschatological manifestation (*parousia)*, current scholars of the intercultural have abandoned this essentialist position due to the impossibility of producing

> a once-for-all adequate formulation of this gospel core [because among other reasons] such a formulation would always need to use a specific language and therefore reflect perceptions of a particular culture.[27]

The third world conference in Lund in 1952 constituted the break of Faith and Order with comparison as the primary ecumenical model and the invigoration of more dialogical agendas. Inspired by the reconciliatory atmosphere of the first post-II World War decade, the ecumenical movement opted for the exploration of the Holy Scriptures as a suitable common basis among traditions, a consideration that was "soon broadened by including Scripture and Tradition"[28] due mainly to pressure from the Eastern churches. At the same time, Christology passed to occupy a place of prominence in ecumenical discussions, with a further focus on a Trinitarian framework. Nevertheless, this did not constitute the complete elimination of comparative elements.

The necessity of comparative elements for ecumenical discussion lies in several advantages. For example, as Hietamäki affirms: "the comparative method allows the churches to clarify and compare the doctrinal positions and church practices."[29] Furthermore, it offers a detailed description of each tradition's doctrinal, historical, and

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[26] M. STEPHON, *Christianity: History, Belief and Practice* (Britannica Educational Publishing, New York 2012) 13.

[27] B. VAN DEN TOREN, "Can we see the naked truth?", in M. COOK and others, *Local Theology for the Global Church* (William Carey Library, Pasadena 2010) 91-108, 93.

[28] G. GASSMANN, "What is Faith and Order?".

[29] M. HIETAMÄKI, "Finding Warmth in the Ecumenical Winter: A Nordic Viewpoint" *The Ecumenical Review* 65/3 (2013) 368-375, 370.

contextual characteristics in a serious attempt to address the inner diversity of the Christian faith. Thus, without the active effort of this approach to identify points of contact, intersections, and divergences among them, all this pluriformity is unable to transcend the descriptive level. Finally, a comparative approach leads to deep ecumenical questions regarding the "nature of the unity the churches are pursuing."[30] Despite these advantages, the achievements of Faith and Order until the 1937 conference in Edinburgh were rather exiguous.

The many shortcomings of the comparative model ended by eroding its methodological position of preeminence in ecumenical discussions. As Edmund Schlink affirmed in his introductory speech at the third World Conference of Faith and Order in Lund: "We have now arrived at a limit in the use of this method," and he labeled it as *statistical* when presupposing comparable static structures among traditions. Furthermore, its mainly descriptive nature did "not demand sacrifices from the churches involved."[31] On the other hand, to presuppose these comparable structures engendered a negation of the vast diversity of the Christian traditions beyond some historic and even aesthetic accidental peculiarities of one supra-contextual faith. In this sense, Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model rejected this idea when stating:

> It is just as hard to think of religions as it is to think of cultures or languages as having a single generic or universal experiential essence of which particular religions-or cultures or languages-are varied manifestations or modifications.[32]

Thus, the untranslatability of discursive, practical, and symbolic religious elements, added to its incapability to impulse negotiated points of encounter among traditions or any mutual enrichment between them, eroded the prominent position of the comparative

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[30] M. HIETAMÄKI, "Finding Warmth in the Ecumenical Winter".

[31] E. SCHLINK, "The Task of Faith and Order in a Pilgrim Church", in O. TOMKINS (ed.), *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order held at Lund August 15th to 28th, 1952* (S. C. M. Press, London 1953) 157.

[32] G. LINDBECK, *The nature of doctrine: Religion and Theology in a postliberal age* (Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1984) 23.

model, producing the emergence of new ecumenical approaches during the second half of the 20th century.

3. THE CONVERGENCE MODEL

The transformation of Faith and Order from a movement to a Commission of the World Council of Churches after 1948 marked a new willingness to overcome the "statistical" character of comparative ecumenism to involve multiple ecclesial voices in ecumenical conversations. Consolidating global fellowships such as the WCC meant a redefinition of ecumenical dialogues as much more plural initiatives, including several churches, denominations, traditions, and movements. Thus, especially since the Third Conference on Faith and Order in 1952, it was evident the need for an ecumenical model could articulate prolonged conversations and negotiations among multiple partners to establish consensus, which was considered as "both aim and basis for theological agreements."[33] In response to this necessity, the convergence model represented a clear vindication of the conciliar character of the church in the pursuit of its various traditions to "rediscover and strengthen the consensus that had been given to them in their attachment to Christ."[34]

The most renowned example of the so-called "convergence documents" is the Lima text, a statement of the Faith and Order Commission that was unanimously accepted in the plenary meeting of 1982 under the title of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. This document makes explicit its nature as a convergence text from its preface: "This Lima text represents the significant theological convergence which Faith and Order has discerned and formulated."[35] It collects the commentaries and clarifications of hundreds of ecclesial communities around the world into a former document with the same title approved by Faith and Order in Accra in 1974 and delivered to local churches

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[33] E. VAN DER BORGHT, *Theology of Ministry*, 154.

[34] E. VAN DER BORGHT, *Theology of Ministry*, 155.

[35] WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order. Paper No. 111) (WCC Publications, Geneva 1982) vii.

and parishes for further discussion. As A. Houtepen acknowledges, the feedback from these local communities contributed to a "greater unity of the text, the clearer distinction between convergences and divergences, and a better incorporation of historical-critical research of scripture and tradition"[36] than in the original Accra text. The BEM document does not pretend to give the impression that a consensus about baptism, eucharist, and ministry has been reached. On the contrary, it describes its achievement as "a remarkable degree of agreement," in contraposition to "full reached consensus" which would represent "that experience of life and articulation of faith necessary to realize and maintain the Church's visible unity."[37]

The Convergence model documents of Faith and Order usually share a common structure. The addressees are the churches and in most cases the document is composed of fifty to a hundred statements, which can consist of one sentence to several paragraphs. Each statement refers to a specific issue in each section. Those statements that are the object of complete or partial rejection from a partaker church are accompanied by commentaries that explicitly state the degree of dissent or the need for further joint scrutiny. Their aim is "to determine the degrees of dissent, convergence, and consensus of these statements."[38] Furthermore, the language to be used "is still largely classical in reconciling historical controversies."[39]

The Convergence model is one of the most complex ones because countless private and official meetings are required to elaborate a common text, numerous experts are responsible for shaping it, and feedback and observations are received from lays, priests, and local leaders from all around the world during the evaluation of non-final versions. For example, the thirty pages of BEM "are the fruit of a 50-year process of study, stretching back to the first Faith and Order

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[36] E. VAN DER BORGHT, *Theology of Ministry,* 147.

[37] WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, vi.

[38] H. WITTE, *Erkenning zonder vernieuwing? Een kritische doorlichting van de luthers, rooms-katholieke dialoog over het ambt in de kerk* (Hertogenbosch Witte Boekhuis, Amsterdam 1988) 11.

[39] WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, vi.

Conference at Lausanne in 1927."[40] In this process, the Faith and Order Commission embodies the collegial character of the church, while experts and theologians who are members of several different churches, denominations, and traditions shape the initial versions of the text. Nevertheless, they do not act as representatives of their churches in these discussions and do not form a sort of *magisterium*.[41] This ambivalence offers a prudent approach from the churches to the discussion process and grants higher theological freedom to the experts. Nevertheless, Van den Borght notices that "a conflict between the roles of these members cannot be excluded entirely."[42]

The formulation of each statement is of particular interest because it clarifies the level of convergence reached on the topic. The central part of the statement refers to the convergence subject and the degree of consensus on the matter. Both WCC convergence documents, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1982) and *The Church, towards a common vision* (2013), openly affirm the lack of complete consensus on different topics. For example, regarding the universal ministry of primacy, the 2013 document declares the following:

> There is still much work to be done to arrive at a convergence on this topic [universal ministry of primacy]. At present Christians do not agree that a universal ministry of primacy is necessary or even desirable, although several bilateral dialogues have acknowledged the value of a ministry in service to the unity of the whole Christian community or even that such a ministry may be included in Christ's will for his Church.[43]

In this way, the document offers a general overview of a doctrine or practice, the possible consensus among churches on the topic, and the level of dissent among participants.

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[40] WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, vi.

[41] A. HOUTEPEN, "Reception, Tradition, Communion", in M. THURIAN (ed.), *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (World Council of Churches, Geneve 1983) 142.

[42] E. VAN DER BORGHT, *Theology of Ministry*, 152.

[43] WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, The Church towards a common vision (Faith and Order Paper No. 214) 31.

The Faith and Order Commission usually expects an answer from the different churches to the documents once they are officially published. As the BEM's preface declares: "The Faith and Order Commission now respectfully invites all churches to prepare an official response to this text at the highest appropriate level of authority."[44] In this case, the number of responses, from different churches, synods, councils, conferences, or assemblies worldwide was noteworthy. Until 1990, the commission received more than 180 official responses, which were compiled and published for further analysis in the following years. The responses from the churches to BEM showed that "there is still much that is unclear about the relationship between scripture, tradition, and traditions."[45]

The use of the Convergence model encompasses a series of advantages. The most important one is that it offers a shared theological approximation to traditional denominational differences and convergences, without which any ecumenical initiative is incomplete. Furthermore, it allows for bridging the seeming gap between the daily practice of local parishes and ecumenical agreements which are often reached by theologians and high ecclesial authorities. By consulting with lay and local priests, this model intends to solve the problem of deficient reception of documents by ordinary believers, at the time that it can elevate ecumenical doubts or mistrusts to denominational leaders. In the same direction, Van der Borght points out that despite this model "does not lead to visible unity, […] it can remove a number of theological obstacles and draw a new joint path for churches and believers."[46] Because of these and similar attributes of the model, a spirit of cautious optimism inspired the ecumenical agenda of the first post-war decades.

Nevertheless, the last decades of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st century ended up revealing and deepening several convergence shortcomings to the point of exhaustion of the model. The first of these shortcomings was the most evident: it did not deal with the obvious doctrinal or liturgical differences that make churches

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[44] WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,* viii.

[45] E. VAN DER BORGHT, *Theology of Ministry,* 164.

[46] E. VAN DER BORGHT, *Theology of Ministry,* 150.

distinct from each other. Thus, the model had little to offer regarding the doctrinal differences that resisted convergence. The same Faith and Order documents made this very evident. For example, BEM clearly distinguishes between "a remarkable degree of agreement" and "a fully reached consensus."[47] In such a model, the convergence dynamics makes it virtually impossible to reach a full consensus and to advance toward a more intimate and visible unity. A further weakness of this model is the language and content of the documents. For example, it is impossible to avoid ambiguity in texts whose authors and addressees are both theological experts and common believers. Hence, according to Von Sinner:

> For the wide public, Faith and Order texts are virtually unintelligible; for academic theologians, they are often weak and bland; for church leaders, they are either too radical or too shallow, either rejected or adapted to what churches already believe and practice.[48]

A final critique of this model proceeds from those who, like Konrad Reiser, former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, place the entire crisis of the modern ecumenical movement, and the convergence model by extension in the framework of the crisis of modernity and its main methodological and epistemological assumptions. From the global South, the so-called representation problem was raised, considering that the composition of the Faith and Order Commission and the convergence editing groups represented a Euro-centric model of the church. Most of its members belonged to a common group: Western male academic theologians and experts over 40 from an upper-middle socioeconomic class with a solid academic background. This composition reflects a tiny minority of the world church, in which female, non-white, non-urban, sexually diverse, poor, or young believers were widely underrepresented.

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[47] WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,* vi.

[48] R. VON SINNER, "Ecumenism in the 21st century: Theses for discussion", The World Council of Churches, 12/05/2007, online: https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/continuation-committee-on-ecumenism-in-the-21st-century/ecumenism-in-the-21st-century-theses-for-discussion (accessed: 06/10/2021).

Furthermore, the Faith and Order approach, as heir of the modern rational paradigm ended up overlooking the multi-dimensional character of religious belongings and experiences when focusing almost entirely on the so-called cognitive elements of each tradition (doctrines, creeds, and official teachings) while paying not enough attention to their non-written elements, symbols, practices, and spiritualities. Thus, its main aim was to offer "a dogmatic and organizational grip on the totality of Christian faith experiences and social questions" while overlooking the "contextual aspects of faith and life experiences."[49] With the awakening of ecumenical critical studies and post-colonial theologies, this attempt to formulate a consensual "meta-theology" or "meta-story" of Christianity revealed its dogmatic and ideological true colors and the lack of feasibility of such an enterprise.

CONCLUSIONS

The so-called Modern stage of the ecumenical movement which academics assign to the period from the 1910 *Edinburgh Missionary Conference* until the beginning of the "Ecumenical Winter," which Duguid-May situates after the 1983 Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches,[50] was an especially fruitful one. This period consolidated some of the most prominent ecumenical fellowships, such as the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. During this period, bilateral and multilateral ecumenical agreements between churches and traditions reflected a diversity of approaches to the ecumenical issue, which, despite the significant quantity of agreements and encounters they assisted, due to a series of limitations and shortcomings, ended up revealing how manifold and elusive the long-awaited Christian unity turned out to be.

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[49] E. VAN DER BORGHT, *Theology of Ministry*, 164.

[50] M. DUGUID-MAY, "The Ecumenical Movement", in J. SCHJORRING – N. HJELM (ed.), *History of Global Christianity: History of Christianity in the 20th Century* (Brill, Leiden 2018) 147-181, 170.

What most of these models had in common was a clear focus on the doctrinal contents of the involved traditions and exploring to what degree these doctrines were able to identify analog points of encounter in their ecclesial counterparts. Nevertheless, these efforts proved insufficient once the non-analogous and even contradictory elements of each faith tradition arose, as in the case of the comparative and convergence models. On the other hand, the minimalist model, which sought to avoid specific doctrinal issues for the sake of claiming full communion among the parts, ended up producing a minimum union of two independent, and in the practice, scarcely integrated traditions.

The three models define a period marked by significant advances in the ecumenical agenda, but, at the same time, an over-optimistic approach characterized by a modern and almost structuralist and essentialist vision of the Christian faith. The models overlooked the multi-dimensional and even pluri-epistemological character of each faith and the experiences it invigorates, when focusing almost entirely on the so-called "cognitive" elements of each Christian tradition. Following Reiser, the shock waves produced by the collapse of modernity echoed through all academic disciplines and globalist projects, which also revealed the contradictions and weaknesses of the modern ecumenical project, provoking its complete reshaping.

In recent times, less essentialist and more epistemologically diverse models constitute novel attempts to revitalize the 21st century ecumenical movement. For instance, current receptive ecumenism makes a clear programmatic shift when focusing

> less at short-term harmonization and reconciliation, [and concentrating] more at long-term mutual challenges, developments, and growth by bringing the traditions into encounter with each other precisely in their difference.[51]

Durham's professor P. Murray describes the receptive model as an ecumenism of the "wounded hands: of being prepared to show our

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[51] P. MURRAY, "Introducing Receptive Ecumenism", in U. ANDRÉE and others (ed.), *Reforming Theology, Migrating Church, Transforming Society* (Missionshilfe Verlag, Hamburg 2017) 55.

wounds to each other, knowing that we cannot heal or save ourselves; knowing that we need to be ministered to in our need from another's gift and grace."[52] Nevertheless, it remains unclear how this model will make it possible to achieve inter-ecclesial visible communion. A recent example of outstanding ecumenical success occurred between the Church of Sweden and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht. Inter-ecclesial dialogues with a clear emphasis on shared experiences and practices instead of doctrinal and theological subjects have taken place since 2005. In 2013 a bilateral dialogue commission published a concluding report titled *Utrecht and Uppsala on the way to communion.*[53] The agreement specified that:

> the unity of the church does not require absolute uniformity in structure, nor in forms of worship or even theology. Unity is a unity in reconciled diversity, spiritual, but made visible through sacramental communion.[54]

This eucharistic and experiential emphasis permeates the entire document, for example when the Old Catholic Churches affirm: "In the diaconate, [we] would benefit from cooperation with the Church of Sweden, by learning from their experience and by joint projects."[55] Full communion was confirmed at the General Synod of the Church of Sweden in Uppsala in 2016 and at Utrecht in 2017.

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[52] P. MURRAY, "Introducing Receptive Ecumenism", 57.

[53] JOINT OLD CATHOLIC CHURCHES OF THE UNION OF UTRECHT AND THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN COMMISSION, *Utrecht and Uppsala on the way to Communion* (Utrecht: 2013).

[54] JOINT COMMISSION, *Utrecht and Uppsala,* 5.

[55] JOINT COMMISSION, *Utrecht and Uppsala,* 24.